

The Territory

Bradley Denton

1993

Sam came awake and sat up choking. His chest was as tight as if wrapped in steel cables, and his heart was trying to hammer its way out. He gulped a breath and coughed. The air in the abandoned barn was thick with dust. There was just enough light for him to see the swirling motes.

A few feet away, the skinny form of Fletcher Taylor groaned and rose on one elbow. "What the hell's wrong?" he asked.

"Shut the hell up," the man on the other side of Taylor said.

"You go to hell," Taylor snapped.

"Go to hell yourself."

"Let me sleep, or I'll send you all to hell," another man said.

"The hell you will."

"The hell I won't."

Taylor shook a finger at Sam. "See all the hell you've raised?"

Sam put on the new slouch hat that Taylor had given him, pulled on his boots, and stood, picking up the leather saddlebags he'd been using as a pillow. "I'm sorry as hell," he said, and left the barn, trying not to kick more than four or five of the other men on his way out.

The light was better outside, but the sun had not yet risen. Sam closed his left nostril with a finger and blew through his right, then closed his right nostril and blew through his left, trying to clear his head of dust. The ground was dry. The thunderheads that had formed the night before had rolled by without dropping enough rain to fill a teacup. He could have slept outside, in clean air, and been fine. As it was, his head ached. This wasn't the first night he had spent in a barn or corn crib since leaving the river, but he still wasn't used to it. At three months shy of twenty-eight, he feared that he was already too old for this kind of life.

Most of the camp was still asleep, but a few men were building fires and boiling chicory. One of them gestured to Sam to come on over, but Sam shook his head and pointed at the sycamore grove that served as the camp latrine. The other man nodded.

Sam went into the trees, and within twenty steps the smells of chicory and smoke were overwhelmed by the smell caused by two hundred men all doing their business in the same spot over the course of a week. It was even worse than usual this morning, because the leaders of other guerrilla bands had brought some of their own men into camp the day before. But at least Sam had the grove to himself for now.

When he had finished his business, he continued eastward through the grove until the stench faded and the trees thinned. Then he sat down with his back against the bole of a sycamore and opened one of his saddlebags. He removed his Colt Navy revolver and laid it on the ground beside him, then took out a pen, a bottle of ink, and the deerhide pouch that held his journal. He slid the notebook from the pouch and flipped pages until he reached a blank sheet, then opened the ink bottle, dipped his pen, and began to write.

Tuesday, August 11, 1863:

I have had the same dream again, or I should say, another variation thereof. This time when I reached the dead man, I discovered that his face was that of my brother Henry. Then I awoke with the thought that it was my fault that Henry was on board the *Pennsylvania* when she blew, which in turn led to the thought that I was an idiot to ask a young and unsure physician to give him morphine.

But I would have been on the *Pennsylvania* as well had it not been for the malice of a certain William Brown, perhaps the only man caught in that storm of metal, wood, and steam who received what he deserved. As for the morphine, Dr. Peyton himself instructed me to ask the night doctor to give Henry an eighth of a grain should he become restless. If the doctor administered too much, the fault was his, not mine.

I see by my words that I have become hard. But five years have passed since that night in Memphis, and I have seen enough in those years that the hours I spent at Henry's deathbed do not seem so horrific now -- or, at least, they do not seem so during my waking hours.

A pistol shot rang out back at camp and was followed by the shouted curses of men angry at having been awakened. Someone had killed a rat or squirrel, and might soon wish that he'd let the creature live to gnaw another day. These once-gentle Missouri farmboys had become as mean as bobcats. They generally saved their bullets for Bluebellies, but didn't mind using their fists and boots on each other.

The dream seems more pertinent, Sam continued, on those nights when the man's face is that of Orion. Orion was as intolerable a scold as any embittered crone, and a Republican crone at that -- but he was my brother, and it might have been in my power to save him.

Sam paused, rolling the pen between his fingers. He looked up from the paper and stared at the brightening eastern sky until his eyes stung. Then he dipped the pen and resumed writing.

It is as fresh and awful in my memory as if it had happened not two years ago, but two days ago.

I could have fought the Red Legs, as Orion and our companions tried to do. I had a Smith & Wesson seven-shooter. If I had used it, I would have either preserved Orion's life, or fallen beside him. Either result would have been honorable.

But I faltered. When the moment came, I chose to surrender, and handed over my pistol -- which one of the Red Legs laughed at, saying he was glad I had not fired the weapon, for to be struck with a ball from its barrel might give one a nasty welt.

Then, as if to prove his point, he turned it on the driver, and on the conductor, and on Mr. Bemis, and on my brother.

As Orion lay dying, the Red Leg attempted to shoot me as well. But the pistol misfired, and I ran. Two of the Red Legs caught me and took my watch, but then let me go, saying that killing a Missourian the likes of me would not be so advantageous to their cause as letting me live.

I continued to run like the coward I had already proven myself to be.

Sam paused again. His hand was shaking, and he didn't think he would be able to read the jagged scrawl of what he had just written. But he would always know what the words said.

He rubbed his forehead with his wrist, then turned the notebook page and dipped his pen.

I could not have saved Henry. But Orion would be alive today, safe in Nevada Territory, had I been a man. And I would be there with him instead of here at Blue Springs; I would be thriving in the mountains of the West instead of sweltering in the chaos of Western Missouri.

I have remained in Missouri to pay for my sin, but in two years have had no success in doing so. Perhaps now that I have come to Jackson County and fallen in with the Colonel's band, my luck will change.

When this war began, I served with my own county's guerrilla band, the Marion Rangers, for three weeks. But there the actual need for bushwhacking was about as substantial as an owl's vocabulary. That was before I had crossed the state, entered Kansas, and encountered the Red Legs. That was before I had seen my brother shot down as if he were a straw target.

I have not had a letter from Mother, Pamela, or Mollie in several weeks, although I have written to each of them as often as I can. I do not know whether this means that they have disowned me, or whether their letters are not reaching Independence. I intend to go up to investigate once this coming business is completed, assuming that it does not complete me in the process.

Sam laid the journal on the ground and wiped his ink-stained fingers on the grass. Then he peered into the ink bottle and saw that it was almost empty. He decided not to buy more until he was sure he would live long enough to use it.

The sun had risen and was a steady heat on Sam's face. The day was going to be hot. Another shot rang out back at camp, and this time it was followed by yips and hollers. The boys were up and eager.

Sam slid his journal into its pouch, then returned it and the other items to the saddlebag. He stood, stretched, and walked back to Colonel Quantrill's camp.

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As he emerged from the sycamores, Sam saw fifty or sixty of his fellow bushwhackers clustered before Quantrill's tent. The tent was open, and the gathered men, although keeping a respectful distance, were trying to see and hear what was going on inside. Fletcher Taylor was standing at the rear of the cluster,

scratching his sparse beard.

"Morning, Fletch," Sam said as he approached. "Sleep well?"

Taylor gave him a narrow-eyed glance. "Rotten, thanks to you."

"Well, you're welcome."

"Be quiet. I'm trying to hear."

"Hear what?"

"You know damn well what. The Colonel's planning a raid. Most of the boys are betting it'll be Kansas City, but my money's on Lawrence."

Sam nodded. "The story I hear is that the Colonel's wanted to teach Jim Lane and Lawrence a lesson ever since he lived there himself."

A man standing in front of Taylor turned to look at them. "I'd like to teach Jim Lane a lesson too," he said, "but I'm not crazy and neither's the Colonel. Lawrence is forty miles inside the border, and the Bluebellies are likely to be as thick as flies on a dead possum. It'd be like putting our pistols to our own heads."

"Maybe," Sam said.

The man raised an eyebrow. "What do you mean, maybe? You know something I don't?"

Sam shrugged and said nothing. Two nights before, in a dream, he had seen Colonel Quantrill surrounded by a halo of fire, riding into Lawrence before a band of shooting, shouting men. He had known the town was Lawrence because all of its inhabitants had looked like the caricatures he had seen of Senator Jim Lane and had worn red pants. Sam had learned to trust his dreams when they were as clear as that. Several days before the Pennsylvania had exploded, a dream had shown him Henry lying in a coffin; and before he and Orion had left St. Joseph, a dream had shown him Orion lying dead in the dust. But it wouldn't do to talk of his dreams with the other bushwhackers. Most of them seemed to think that Sam Clemens was odd enough as it was, hoarding perfectly good ass-wiping paper just so he could write on it.

"Well, you're wrong," the man said, taking Sam's shrug as a statement. "Kansas City's got it coming just as bad, and there's places for a man to hide when he's done."

Taylor looked thoughtful. "I see your point," he said. "Calling on Senator Lane would be one thing, but coming home from the visit might be something else."

Sam stayed quiet. It didn't matter what the others thought now. They would mold bullets and make cartridges until they were told where to shoot them, and they'd be just as happy to shoot them in Lawrence as anywhere else -- happier, since most of the jayhawkers and Red Legs who had robbed them, burned them out of their homes, killed their brothers, and humiliated their women had either hailed from Lawrence or pledged their allegiance to Jim Lane. And if Quantrill could pull several guerrilla bands together under his command, he would have enough men both to raid Lawrence and to whip the Federals on the way there and back.

Captain George Todd emerged from the tent and squinted in the sunlight. He was a tall, blond,

square-jawed man whom some of the men worshipped even more than they did Quantrill. He was wearing a blue jacket he'd taken from a dead Union lieutenant.

"Hey, cap'n, where we going?" someone called out.

Todd gave the men a stern look. "I doubt we'll be going anywhere if you boys keep standing around like sick sheep when there's guns to be cleaned and bridles to be mended."

The men groaned, but began to disperse.

"FletchTaylor !" Todd yelled. "Wherever you are, get your ass in here!" He turned and went back into the tent.

Sam nudged Taylor. "Now, what would a fine leader of men like George Todd be wanting with a lowdown thief like you?" he asked.

Taylor sneered. "Well, he told me to keep my eyes open for Yankee spies," he said, "so I reckon he'll be wanting me to give him your name." He started for the tent.

"I'm not worried!" Sam called after him. "He'll ask you to spell it, and you'll be stumped!"

Taylor entered the tent, and someone pulled the flaps closed. Sam stood looking at the tent for a moment longer, then struck off across camp in search of breakfast. Why Quantrill and the other guerrilla leaders were taking so long to form their plans, and why they were keeping the men in the dark, he couldn't imagine. There shouldn't be any great planning involved in striking a blow at Lawrence and the Red Legs: Ride in hard, attack the Red Legs' headquarters and the Union garrison like lightning, and then ride out again, pausing long enough to set fire to Jim Lane's house to pay him back for the dozens of Missouri houses he'd burned himself.

As for keeping the rank-and-file bushwhackers ignorant . . . well, there were about as many Yankee spies among Quantrill's band as there were fish in the sky. Sam had talked to over a hundred of these men, and all of them had lost property or family to abolitionist raiders of one stripe or another. Sam had even spoken with one man whose brother had been killed by John Brown in 1856, and who still longed for vengeance even though John Brown was now as dead as a rock.

Vengeance could be a long time coming, as Sam well knew. In the two years since Orion's murder, he had yet to kill a single Federal soldier, let alone one of the marauding Kansas Red Legs. It wasn't for lack of trying, though. He had fired countless shots at Bluebellies, but always at a distance or in the dark. He had never hit anything besides trees and the occasional horse.

Sam had a breakfast of fatty bacon with three young brothers who were from Ralls County south of Hannibal and who therefore considered him a kinsman. He ate their food, swapped a few East Missouri stories, and promised to pay them back with bacon of his own as soon as he had some. Then he shouldered his saddlebags again and walked to the camp's makeshift corral to see after his horse, Bixby.

Bixby was a swaybacked roan gelding who had been gelded too late and had a mean disposition as a result. The horse also seemed to think that he knew better than Sam when it came to picking a travel route, or when it came to deciding whether to travel at all. Despite those flaws, however, Sam had no plans to replace Bixby. He thought that he had the horse he deserved.

Sam tried to give Bixby a lump of hard brown sugar from one of his saddlebags, but Bixby ignored it

and attempted to bite Sam's shoulder.

"Sometimes I think you forget," Sam said, slapping Bixby on the nose, "that I am the man who freed you from your bondage to an abolitionist."

Bixby snorted and stomped, then tried to bite Sam's shoulder again.

"Clemens!" a voice called.

Sam turned and saw that the voice belonged to one of the Ralls County boys who had fed him breakfast.

"The Colonel wants you at the tent!" the boy shouted.

Sam was astonished. Except for his friendship with Fletch Taylor, he was less than a nobody in the band. Not only was he a new arrival, but it was already obvious that he was the worst rider, the worst thief, and the worst shot. Maybe Taylor really had told Todd and Quantrill that he was a Yankee spy.

"Better come quick!" the boy yelled.

Sam waved. "I'll be right -- God damn son of a bitch!"

Bixby had succeeded in biting him. Sam whirled and tried to slug the horse in the jaw with the saddlebags, but Bixby jerked his head up and danced away.

Sam rubbed his shoulder and glared at Bixby. "Save some for the Red Legs, why don't you," he said. Then he ducked under the corral rope and hurried to Quantrill's tent. He remembered to remove his hat before going inside.

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William Clarke Quantrill leaned back, his left leg crossed over his right, in a polished oak chair behind a table consisting of three planks atop two sawhorses. He wore a white embroidered "guerrilla shirt," yellow breeches, and black cavalry boots. He gave a thin smile as Sam approached the table. Above his narrow upper lip, his mustache was a straight reddish-blond line. His eyelids drooped, but his blue-gray eyes probed Sam with a gaze as piercing as a bayonet. Sam stopped before the table and clenched his muscles so he wouldn't shudder. His own eyes, he had just realized, were of much the same color as Quantrill's.

"You've only been with us since June, Private Clemens," Quantrill said in a flat voice, "and yet it seems that you have distinguished yourself. Corporal Taylor tells me you saved his life a few weeks ago."

Sam looked at Fletch Taylor, who was standing at his left. Taylor appeared uncomfortable under Sam's gaze, so Sam looked past him at some of the other men in the tent. He recognized the guerrilla leaders Bill Gregg and Andy Blunt, but several of the others were strangers to him.

"Well, sir," Sam said to Quantrill, "I don't know that I did. My horse was being cantankerous and brought me in on an abolitionist's house about two hundred feet behind and to one side of Fletch and the other boys, so I happened to see a man hiding up a tree."

"He was aiming a rifle at Corporal Taylor, I understand," Quantrill said.

"Yes, sir, that's how it looked," Sam said. "So I hollered and took a shot at him."

"And that was his undoing."

Sam twisted the brim of his hat in his hands. "Actually, sir," he said, "I believe that I missed by fourteen or fifteen feet."

Quantrill uncrossed his legs and stood. "But you diverted the ambusher's attention. According to Corporal Taylor, the ambusher then fired four shots at you, one of which took your hat from your head, before he was brought down by a volley from your comrades. Meanwhile you remained steadfast, firing your own weapon without flinching, even though the entire focus of the enemy's fire was at yourself."

Sam licked his lips and said nothing. The truth was that he had been stiff with terror -- except for his right hand, which had been cocking and firing the Colt, and his left foot, which had been kicking Bixby in the ribs in an effort to make the horse wheel and run. But Bixby, who seemed to be deaf as far as gunfire was concerned, had been biting a crabapple from a tree and had not cared to move. The horse's position had blocked the other bushwhackers' view of Sam's left foot.

Quantrill put his hands on the table and leaned forward. "That was a brave and noble act, Private Clemens," he said.

A stretch of silence followed until Sam realized that he was expected to say something. "Thank, thank you, Colonel," he stammered. It was well known that Quantrill liked being called "Colonel."

"You understand, of course," Quantrill said, "that in the guerrilla service we have no formal honors. However, as the best reward of service is service itself, I'm promoting you to corporal and ordering you to reconnoiter the enemy in the company of Corporal Taylor."

"And a nigger," someone on Sam's right said. The voice was low, ragged, and angry.

Sam turned toward the voice and saw the most fearsome man he had ever seen in his life. The man wore a Union officer's coat with the insignia torn off, and a low-crowned hat with the brim turned up. His brown hair was long and shaggy, and his beard was the color of dirt. His face was gaunt, and his eyes, small and dark, glowered. He wore a wide-buckled belt with two pistols jammed into it. A scalp hung from the belt on each side of the buckle.

George Todd, standing just behind this man, placed a hand on his shoulder. "I don't much like it either, Bill, but Quantrill's right. A nigger's the perfect spy."

The seated man shook Todd's hand away. "Perfect spy, my hairy ass. You can't trust a nigger any more than you can trust Abe Lincoln."

Quantrill looked at the man without blinking. "That concern is why I'm sending two white men as well -- one that I trust, and one that he in turn trusts. Don't you agree that two white men can keep one nigger under control, Captain Anderson?"

Anderson met Quantrill's gaze with a glare. "I have three sisters in prison in Kansas City for the simple act of remaining true to their brother's cause," he said. "I do not believe they would care to hear that their brother agreed to send a nigger to fight in that same cause, particularly knowing the treachery of which that race is capable."

Quantrill smiled. "As for sending a nigger to fight, I'm doing no such thing just yet. I'm sending him as a spy and as a guarantee of safe conduct for two brave sons of Missouri. No Kansan is likely to assault white men traveling with a free nigger. As for treachery, well, I assure you that John Noland has proven his loyalty. He's killed six Yankee soldiers and delivered their weapons to me. I trust him as much as I would a good dog, and have no doubt that he will serve Corporals Taylor and Clemens as well as he has me." The Colonel looked about the tent. "Gentlemen, we've been jawing about this enterprise for twenty-four hours. I suggest that it's now time to stop jawing and begin action. If you never risk, you never gain. Are there any objections?"

No one spoke. Anderson spat into the dirt, but then looked at Quantrill and shook his head.

"Very well," said Quantrill. "Captains Anderson and Blunt will please gather your men and communicate with me by messenger when your forces are ready." He nodded to Taylor. "Corporal, you're to return no later than sundown next Monday. So you'd best be on your way."

Sam made a noise in his throat. "Sir? On our way where?"

Quantrill turned to Sam. "Kansas Territory," he said. "Corporal Taylor has the particulars. You're dismissed."

Sam didn't need to be told twice. He left the tent, picked up his saddlebags where he'd dropped them outside, and then ran into the sycamore grove.

Taylor caught up with him in the trees. "You should have saluted, Sam," he said. "It's important to show the Colonel proper respect."

Sam unbuttoned his pants. His head was beginning to ache again. "I have plenty of respect for the Colonel," he said. "I have plenty of respect for all of them. If they were to cut me open, I'd probably bleed respect. Now get away and let a man piss in peace."

Taylor sighed. "All right. Get your horse saddled as soon as you can. I'll find Noland and meet you north of the tent. You know Noland?"

"No. But since I've only seen one man of the Negro persuasion in camp, I assume that's him."

"You assume correctly." Taylor started to turn away, then looked back again. "By the way, we were right. We're going to Lawrence. You and I are to count the Bluebellies in the garrison, and -- "

"I know what a spy does, Fletch," Sam said.

Taylor turned away. "Hurry up, then. We have some miles to cover." He left the grove.

Sam emptied his bladder and buttoned his pants, then leaned against a tree and retched until he brought up most of the bacon he'd had for breakfast.

"Kansas Territory," Quantrill had said. There had been no sarcasm in his voice. Kansas had been admitted to the Union over two and a half years before, but none of the bushwhackers ever referred to it as a state. In their opinion, its admission to the Union as a free state had been an illegal act forced upon its residents by fanatical jayhawkers. Sooner or later, though, those house-burning, slave-stealing jayhawkers would be crushed, and Kansas Territory would become what it was meant to be: a state governed by Southern men who knew what was right.

To that end, Colonel Quantrill would raid the abolitionist town of Lawrence, the home of Jim Lane and the Kansas Red Legs. And Sam Clemens was to go there first and come back to tell Quantrill how to go about the task.

Orion's ghost, he thought, had better appreciate it.

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On Wednesday morning, six miles south of Lawrence on the Paola road, Fletch Taylor started chuckling. Sam, riding in the center, glanced first at him and then at John Noland. Noland didn't even seem to be aware of Sam or Taylor's existence, let alone Taylor's chuckling.

Noland was an enigma, both in his mere presence in Quantrill's band and in his deportment during the present journey. No matter what Sam or Taylor said or did, he continued to look straight ahead, shifting in his saddle only to spit tobacco juice into the road. Except for the color of his skin, though, Noland's appearance was like that of any other free man of the border region, right down to the slouch hat and the Colt stuck in his belt. He even rode with the same easy arrogance as Taylor. It was a skill Sam had never mastered.

Sam looked at Taylor again, squinting as he faced the sun. "What's so funny, Fletch?"

Taylor gestured at the winding track of the road. "No pickets," he said. "We ain't seen a Bluebelly since we came into Kansas. If the Colonel wanted to, the whole lot of us could waltz in and raise no more notice than a cottontail rabbit." He chuckled again. "Until we started shooting."

Sam nodded, but didn't laugh. It was true that they hadn't passed a single Federal picket, but that didn't mean Lawrence was going to be a waltz. The absence of pickets might only mean that the town had fortified itself so well that it didn't need them.

"You should carry your gun in your belt," Noland said. His voice was a rumble.

Sam was startled. Until now, Noland hadn't spoken at all.

"Are you addressing me?" Sam asked, turning back toward Noland. But he knew that must be the case. Both Noland and Taylor had their pistols in their belts, while Sam's was in one of his saddlebags.

Noland looked straight ahead. "That's right."

"I thought I should make sure," Sam said, "since you won't look me in the eye."

"Your eyes ain't pleasant to look at," Noland said.

Taylorchortled. "Whomp him, Sam. Make him say your eyes are the most beautiful jewels this side of a St. Louie whorehouse."

"It ain't a question of beauty," Noland said. "It's a question of skittishness. Mr. Clemens has skittish eyes. I prefer steady ones, like those of Colonel Quantrill. Or like your own, Mister Taylor."

Now Sam laughed. "It appears that you've bested me in the enticing eyeball category, Fletch. Perhaps we should switch places so you can ride next to John here."

Taylor scowled. "Ain't funny, Sam."

Sam knew when to stop joking with Fletch Taylor, so he replied to Noland instead. "My gun's fine where it is," he said. "Why should I put it in my belt and risk shooting myself in the leg?"

"If that's your worry, you can take out the caps," Noland said. "But it'll look better going into Lawrence if your gun's in the open. The county sheriff might be inspecting strangers, and he won't think nothing of it if your pistol's in your belt. But if he finds it in your bag, he'll think you're trying to hide it."

Sam didn't know whether Noland was right or not, but it wasn't worth arguing about. He took his pistol from his saddlebag, removed the caps, and tucked the weapon into his belt.

"Be sure to replace those caps when we come back this way with the Colonel," Taylor said. He sounded disgusted.

"I merely want to ensure that I don't shoot up the city of Lawrence prematurely," Sam said. But neither Taylor nor Noland laughed. Sam gave Bixby a pat on the neck, and Bixby looked back at him and snorted.

When the three bushwhackers were within a mile of Lawrence, they encountered two riders heading in the opposite direction. The two men, one old and one young, were dressed in high-collared shirts and black suits despite the August heat. They wore flat-brimmed black hats, and their pistols hung in black holsters at their sides. The younger man held a Bible with a black leather cover, reading aloud as he rode.

"Well, lookee here," Taylor whispered as the two approached. "I think we got ourselves a couple of abolitionist preachers on our hands."

Sam tensed. If there was one thing a bushwhacker hated more than an abolitionist, it was an abolitionist with a congregation. Taylor had particularly strong feelings in this regard, and Sam feared that his friend might forget that they were only in Kansas as spies for now.

"Good morning, friends," the elder preacher said, reining his horse to a stop. The younger man closed his Bible and stopped his horse as well. They blocked the road.

"Good morning to you as well," Taylor replied. He and Noland stopped their horses a few yards short of the preachers.

Sam tried to stop Bixby too, but Bixby ignored the reins and continued ahead, trying to squeeze between the horses blocking the way. The preachers moved their mounts closer together, forcing Bixby to halt, and the roan shook his head and gave an irritated whuff.

"I apologize, gentlemen," Sam said. "My horse sometimes forgets which of us was made in God's image."

The elder preacher frowned. "More discipline might be in order," he said, and then looked past Sam at Taylor. "Are you going into Lawrence?"

"That we are," said Taylor. His voice had taken on a gravelly tone that Sam recognized as trouble on the way. He glanced back and saw that Taylor's right hand was hovering near the butt of his pistol.

"I see that you are traveling with a colored companion," the younger preacher said. "Is he your servant?"

"No," Sam said before Taylor could reply. "My friend and I jayhawked him from Arkansas three years ago, and we've been trying to help him find his family ever since. Are there any colored folks named Smith in Lawrence?"

The elder preacher nodded. "A number, I believe." He twitched his reins, and his horse moved to the side of the road. "I would like to help you in your search, gentlemen, but my son and I are on our way to Baldwin to assist in a few overdue baptisms. Sometimes an older child resists immersion and must be held down."

"I have observed as much myself," Sam said as the elder preacher rode past.

The younger preacher nodded to Sam and thumped his Bible with his fingertips. "If you gentlemen will be in town through the Sabbath, I would like to invite you to attend worship at First Lawrence Methodist."

Taylor came up beside Sam. "I doubt we'll be in town that long, preacher," he said. "But we'll be sure to pay your church a visit the next time we pass through."

"I am glad to hear it," the young preacher said. "God bless you, gentlemen." He nudged his horse with his heels and set off after his father.

Taylor looked over his shoulder at the departing men. "You won't be so glad when it happens," he muttered.

Noland rode up. "Jayhawked from Arkansas," he said. "That's a good one." He spurred his horse, which set off at a trot. Taylor's horse did likewise. Bixby, for once, took the cue and hurried to catch up.

"I'm sorry if my lie didn't meet with your approval," Sam said as Bixby drew alongside Noland's horse.

"I said it was a good one," Noland said. "I say what I mean."

"You may believe him on that score, Sam," Taylor said. "John's as honest a nigger as I've ever known."

Sam eyed Noland. "Well, then, tell me," he said. "Where were you jayhawked from?"

"I was born a free man in Ohio," Noland said. "Same as Colonel Quantrell."

"I see," Sam said. "And how is it that a free man of your race rides with a free man like the Colonel?"

Noland turned to look at Sam for the first time. His eyes and face were like black stone.

"He pays me," Noland said.

Sam had no response to that. But Noland kept looking at him.

"So why do you ride with the Colonel?" Noland asked.

"Might as well ask Fletch the same question," Sam said.

"I know all about Mister Taylor," Noland said. "His house was burned, his property stolen. But I don't know shit about you."

Taylor gave Noland a look of warning. "Don't get uppity."

"It's all right, Fletch," Sam said. Fair was fair. He had asked Noland an impertinent question, so Noland had asked him one. "I was a steamboat pilot on the Mississippi, Mister Noland. I was a printer's devil before that, but I wanted to be on the river, so I made it so." He grimaced. "I was a cub for two years before I earned my license, and I was only able to follow the profession for another two years before the war started. I had to leave the river then, or be forced to pilot a Union boat. So here I am."

"How'd you come to be on this side of Missouri instead of that side?" Noland asked.

"I was going to Nevada Territory with my brother," Sam said, angry now at being prodded, "but the Red Legs killed him northwest of Atchison. I went back home after that, but eventually realized there was nothing useful I could do there. So I came back this way and fell in with one bunch of incompetents after another until I joined the Colonel." He glared at Noland. "So here I am."

"So here you are," Noland said.

"That's about enough, John," Taylor said. He looked at Sam. "I didn't know you were a printer, Sam, but I'm glad to hear it. It'll make one of our tasks easier. Marshal Donaldson's posse tore up the Lawrence Herald of Freedom's press and dumped the type in the Kansas River back in '56, but the Lawrence Journal's sprung up like a weed to take its place. So when we raid Lawrence, the Journal's to be destroyed. But we'll need to know how well the office is armed, so I suggest that you go there and ask for employment. You'll be able to get a look at things without them wondering why. After you've done that, you can help me count Bluebellies, Red Legs, and Lawrence Home Guards, if we can find out who they are."

"What if the Journal wants to hire me?" Sam asked.

Taylor grinned. "Tell them you'll be back in a week or so." He looked across at Noland. "John, you're to fall in with the local niggers and see whether any of them have guns. You might also ask them about Jim Lane, since they love him so much. Find out where his fancy new house is, and how often he's there."

Noland was staring straight ahead again, but he nodded.

They were now skirting the base of a high, steep hill. Sam looked up the slope. "One of the boys at Blue Springs told me that the hill rising over Lawrence is called Mount Horeb," he said. "It must be named after the place where Moses saw the burning bush."

Taylor chuckled. "If Moses is still here, he'll see more burning before long, at closer range than he might like." He pointed toward the southeast, at another hill that was a few miles distant. "That might be a safer place for him to watch from. The Colonel says it'll be our last stop before the raid, so we can see what's what before it's too late to turn back." He spurred his horse, which galloped ahead. "Come on, boys! We've reached Lawrence!"

Noland spurred his horse as well, and he and Taylor vanished around the curve of the hill.

"Now that I think of it," Sam yelled after them, "he said Mount Oread, not Horeb. Moses doesn't have anything to do with it."

He kicked Bixby, but the horse only looked back at him and gave a low nicker. It was the saddest sound Sam had ever heard.

"Do you have a stomachache?" he asked.

Bixby looked forward again and plodded as if leading a funeral procession. Sam kicked the horse once more and then gave up. The sadness of Bixby's nicker had infected him, and he felt oppressed by the heat, by his companions, and by his very existence on the planet.

They followed the road around the hill, and then Lawrence lay before Sam like a toy city put together by a giant child. Its rows of stores and houses were too neat and perfect to be real. Small wagons rolled back and forth between them, and children dashed about like scurrying ants. Taylor and Noland were already among them.

Sam closed his eyes, but then opened them immediately, crying out before he could stop himself.

He had just seen the buildings, wagons, and children burst into flame.

Sam shook himself. Here he was having nightmares while wide awake. The ride had been too long, the sun too hot. It was time for a rest.

But maybe not for sleep.

#

Early Friday, Sam awoke in sweat-soaked sheets. He fought his way free, then sat up with his back against the wall. He had just spent his second night in Lawrence, and his second night in a real bed in almost three months. The dream had come to him on both nights, worse than ever. He was no more rested than if he had run up and down Mount Oread since sundown.

The dream always began the same way: He and the other Marion Rangers, fifteen men in all, were bedding down in a corn crib at Camp Ralls, fourteen miles south of Hannibal. They had to chase the rats away, but they had to do that every night. Then a Negro messenger came and told them that the enemy was nearby. They scoffed; they had heard that before.

But they grew tense and restless, and could not sleep. The sounds of their breathing were unsteady. Sam's heart began to beat faster.

Then they heard a horse approaching. Sam and the other Rangers went to the corn crib's front wall and peered out through a crack between the logs. In the dim moonlight, they saw the shadow of a man on a horse enter the camp. Sam was sure that he saw more men and horses behind that shadow. Camp Ralls was being attacked.

Sam picked up a rifle and pushed its muzzle between the logs. His skull was humming, his chest tight. His hands shook. The enemy had come and would kill him. The enemy had come and would kill him. The enemy had come and would--

Someone shouted, "Fire!"

And Sam pulled the trigger. The noise was as loud and the flash as bright as if a hundred guns had gone

off at once.

The enemy fell from his saddle and lay on the ground. Then all was darkness, and silence. There was nothing but the smell of damp earth.

No more riders came. The fallen man was alone.

Sam and the others went out to the enemy. Sam turned the man onto his back, and the moonlight revealed that he was not wearing a uniform, and that his white shirt was soaked with blood. He was not the enemy. He was not even armed. And his face --

Was sometimes Henry's, and sometimes Orion's.

But just now, this Friday morning in Lawrence, it had been someone else's. It had been a face that Sam did not recognize. It had been the face of an innocent stranger, killed by Sam Clemens for no reason at all . . . no reason save that Sam was at war, and the man had gotten in the way.

Fletcher Taylor, in the room's other bed, mumbled in his sleep. Sam could still smell the whiskey. One of Taylor's first acts of spying on Wednesday afternoon had been to hunt up a brothel, and he had been having a fine time ever since. He was counting Bluebellies too, but it had turned out that there weren't many Bluebellies to count.

Sam had visited the brothel with Taylor on Wednesday, but hadn't found the girls to his liking. So he'd spent most of his time since then trying to do his job. He had applied for work at the Lawrence Journal, as planned, and had been turned down, as he'd hoped -- but had learned that the Journal was a two-man, one-boy operation, and that they didn't even dream of being attacked. A carbine hung on pegs on the wall in the pressroom, but it was kept unloaded to prevent the boy from shooting rabbits out the back door. The Journal's type would join the Herald of Freedom's at the bottom of the Kansas River with little difficulty.

From the purplish-gray color of the patch of eastern sky visible through the hotel room window, Sam guessed that it was about five A.M. He climbed out of bed and went to the window to look down at the wide, muddy strip of the town's main thoroughfare, Massachusetts Street. Lawrence was quiet. The buildings were closed up, and no one was outside. Even the Red Legs and Home Guards slept until six or six-thirty. If Colonel Quantrill timed his raid properly, he and his bushwhackers could ride into Lawrence while its citizens were still abed.

The Union garrison shouldn't be much trouble either, Sam thought as he looked north toward the river. The handful of troops stationed in Lawrence had moved their main camp to the north bank of the Kansas, and the only way for them to come back across into town was by ferry, a few at a time. Two small camps of Federal recruits -- one for whites, the other for Negroes -- were located south of the river, in town; but those recruits were green and poorly armed. The raiders could ignore them, or squash them like ladybugs if they were foolish enough to offer resistance.

Sam left the window, pulled the chamber pot from under his bed, and took a piss. Then he lit an oil lamp, poured water from a pitcher into a bowl, and stood before the mirror that hung beside the window. He took his razor and scraped the stubble from his throat, chin, cheeks, and sideburns, but left his thick reddish-brown mustache. He had grown fond of the mustache because it made him look meaner than he really was. The dirt that had been ground into his pores had made him look mean too, but that was gone now. He'd had a bath Wednesday evening, and was thinking of having another one today. Lawrence might be a den of abolitionist murderers, but at least it was a den of abolitionist murderers that

could provide a few of the amenities of civilization.

When he had finished shaving, he combed his hair and dressed, then put out the lamp and left the room. Taylor was still snoring. Whiskey did wonders for helping a man catch up on his sleep.

Sam went downstairs and out to the street, opening and closing the door of the Whitney House as quietly as possible so as not to disturb the Stone family, who owned the place. Taylor had told Sam that Colonel Quantrill had stayed at the Whitney when he'd lived in Lawrence under the name of Charley Hart, and that Mr. Stone had befriended "Hart" and would therefore be treated with courtesy during the raid. So Sam was being careful not to do anything that might be interpreted as discourtesy. He wanted to stay on the Colonel's good side.

The wooden sidewalk creaked under Sam's boots as he walked toward the river. It was a sound that he hadn't noticed on Wednesday or Thursday, when he had shared the sidewalk with dozens of Lawrence citizens. Then, the predominant sounds had been of conversation and laughter, intermingled with the occasional neighing of a horse. But this early in the morning, Sam had Massachusetts Street to himself, save for two dogs that raced past with butcher-bones in their mouths. Sam took a cigar from his coat pocket, lit it with a match, and drew in a lungful of sweet smoke.

He had to admit that Lawrence was a nice-looking town. Most of the buildings were sturdy and clean, and the town was large and prosperous considering that it had been in existence less than ten years. Almost three thousand souls called Lawrence home, and not all of those souls, Sam was sure, were bad ones. Perhaps the raid would succeed in running off those who were, and the city would be improved as a result.

Sam paused before the Eldridge House hotel. The original Eldridge House, a veritable fortress of abolitionist fervor and free-state propaganda, had been destroyed by Marshal Donaldson in 1856, but it had been rebuilt into an even more formidable fortress in the service of the same things. It was a brick building four stories high, with iron grilles over the ground-floor windows. Quantrill might want to destroy the Eldridge House a second time, particularly since the Lawrence Home Guards would probably concentrate their resistance here, but Sam's advice would be to skip it. A mere fifteen or twenty men, armed with Sharps carbines and barricaded in the Eldridge House, would be able to kill a hundred bushwhackers in the street below.

"Hello!" a shrill voice called from across the street. "Good morning, Mister Sir!"

Sam looked across and saw a sandy-haired boy of ten or eleven waving at him. It took a moment before he recognized the boy as the printer's devil from the Lawrence Journal.

Sam took his cigar from his mouth. "Good morning yourself," he said without shouting.

The boy pointed at the Eldridge House. "Are you staying there, Mister Sir?" he yelled. "You must be rich!"

Sam shook his head. "Neither one. But if you keep squawking like a rusty steamboat whistle, I imagine you'll be meeting some of the inhabitants of the Eldridge House presently." He continued up the street.

The boy ran across and joined Sam on the sidewalk. Sam frowned at him and blew smoke at his face, but the boy only breathed it in and began chattering.

"I like the morning before the sun comes up, don't you?" the boy said. "Some days I wake up when it's

still dark, and I ride my pa's mule out to the hills south of town, and I can look down over Lawrence when the sun rises. It makes me feel like the king of the world. Do you know what I mean, Mister Sir?"

"I'm sure I don't," Sam said.

The boy didn't seem to notice that Sam had spoken. "Say, if you aren't at the Eldridge, where are you at, Mister Sir? I'll bet you're at the Johnson House, is what I'll bet. But maybe not, because the Red Legs meet at the Johnson, and they don't like strangers. So I'll bet you're at the Whitney, then, aren't you, Mister Sir?"

"Yes," Sam said. "The Johnson was not much to my liking."

"The Red Legs seem to like it just fine."

Sam nodded. "I have made note of that." And indeed he had. If the Red Legs could be punished for their crimes, he would be able to sleep a little better. And if the specific Red Legs who had killed Orion could be found and strung up, he would sleep better than Adam before the Fall.

"Those Red Legs, they have a time," the boy said. "I just might be a Red Leg myself, when I'm old enough."

"I would advise against it," Sam said, gnawing on his cigar. "The profession has little future."

The boy kicked a rock off the sidewalk. "I guess not," he said. "They say they'll have burned out the secesh in another year, so there won't be nothing left to fight for, will there, Mister Sir?"

"Stop calling me 'Mister Sir,'" Sam said. "If you must speak to me at all, call me Mister Clemens." He saw no danger in using his real name. The self-satisfied citizens of Lawrence clearly didn't expect bushwhackers in their midst, and wouldn't know that he was one even if they did.

"I'm sorry, Mister Clemens," the boy said. "I listened to you talking to Mister Trask at the Journal yesterday, but I didn't hear your name. Would you like to know mine?"

"No," Sam said.

They had reached the northern end of Massachusetts Street and were now walking down a rutted slope toward the ferry landing. Before them, the Kansas River was dull brown in color and less than a hundred yards wide; hardly a river at all, in Sam's opinion. But it would be enough to protect Quantrill's raiders from the soldiers on the far bank, provided that the soldiers didn't realize the raiders were coming until it was too late. To assure himself of that, Sam wanted to see how active or inactive the Bluebellies were at this time of morning. If they were as slumberous as Lawrence's civilians, he would be able to report that there was little chance of any of them ferrying across in time to hinder the raid. There weren't many soldiers in the camp anyway. Taylor had counted only a hundred and twelve, and some of those weren't soldiers at all, but surveyors.

"How come you're heading down to the river, Mister Clemens?" the boy asked. "Are you going fishing?"

Sam stopped walking and glared down at the boy, taking his cigar from his mouth with a slow, deliberate motion. "Do you see a fishing pole in my hand, boy?" he asked, exhaling a bluish cloud.

The boy gazed up at the cigar, which had a two-inch length of ash trembling at its tip.

"No, sir," the boy said. "I see a cigar."

"Then it is reasonable to assume," Sam said, "that I have come to the river not to fish, but to smoke." He tapped the cigar, and the ash fell onto the boy's head.

The boy yelped and jumped away, slapping at his hair.

Sam replaced his cigar between his teeth and continued down the slope.

"That wasn't nice!" the boy shouted after him.

"I'm not a nice man," Sam said. He didn't look back, so he didn't know if the boy heard him. But he reached the riverbank alone.

A thin fog hovered over the water and began to dissipate as the sun rose. The sunlight gave the tents on the far bank a pinkish tinge. The camp wasn't dead quiet, but there wasn't much activity either. At first, Sam saw only two fires and no more than five or six men up and about. As he watched, more men emerged from their tents, but military discipline was lacking. Apparently, these Bluebellies could get up whenever they pleased. That would be good news for the Colonel.

Sam threw the stub of his cigar into the river and heard it hiss. The sun was up now, and the soldiers began emerging from their tents with increasing frequency. From old habit, Sam reached for his pocket watch. But he still hadn't replaced the one that the Red Legs had stolen two years before.

He heard a scuffing sound behind him and looked over his shoulder. The boy from the Journal was close by again, twisting the toe of his shoe in the dirt.

"Say, boy," Sam said, "do you have a watch?"

The boy gave Sam a look of calculated contempt. "Of course I have a watch. Mister Trask gave me his old one. I got to get to the paper on time, don't I?"

"Well, tell me what time it is," Sam said.

"Why should I tell anything to someone who dumped a pound of burning tobacco on my head?"

Sam grinned. The boy was starting to remind him of the boys he had grown up with in Hannibal. "Maybe I'd give a cigar to someone who told me the time."

The boy's expression changed. "Really?"

"I said maybe."

The boy reached into a pocket and pulled out a battered timepiece. He peered at it and said, "This has six o'clock, but it loses thirty-five minutes a day and I ain't set it since yesterday noon. So it might be about half-past."

Sam took a cigar from his coat and tossed it to the boy. "Much obliged, boy."

The boy caught the cigar with his free hand, then replaced his watch in his pocket and gave Sam another

look of contempt. "Stop calling me 'boy,'" he said. "If you must speak to me at all, call me Henry." The boy jammed the cigar into his mouth, turned, and strode up the slope to Massachusetts Street .

Sam turned back to the river. The fog was gone, and most of the soldiers were out of their tents. To be on the safe side, Sam decided, the raid would have to begin no later than five-thirty, and a detachment of bushwhackers would have to come to the river to train their guns on the ferry, just in case. He didn't think he would have any trouble persuading Colonel Quantrill to see the wisdom in that.

He started back up the slope, but paused where the boy from the Journal had stood.

"Henry," Sam murmured. "God damn."

Then he went up to the street and walked to the livery stable to check on Bixby. Bixby was in a foul mood and tried to bite him, so Sam knew that the horse was fine.

#

That evening, Sam was in his and Taylor 's room at the Whitney House, writing down what he had learned so far, when he heard the Journal boy's voice outside. He went to the open window, looked down, and saw the boy astride a brown mule that was festooned with bundles of newspapers. The boy dropped one of the bundles at the Whitney's door, then looked up and saw Sam at the window.

The boy shook his finger at Sam. "That seegar was spoiled, Mister Clemens!" he shouted. "I was sick all afternoon, but Mister Trask made me work anyway!"

"Good," Sam said. "It builds character."

The boy gave Sam yet another contemptuous look, then kicked the mule and proceeded down the street.

As the boy left, four men wearing blue shirts and red leather leggings rode past going the other way. They all carried pistols in hip holsters, and one had a rifle slung across his back. They were unshaven and ugly, and they laughed and roared as they rode up Massachusetts Street . They would no doubt cross the river and make trouble for someone north of town tonight. Sam didn't recognize any of them, but that didn't matter. They were Kansas Red Legs, meaner and more murderous than even Jennison's Jayhawkers had been; and if they themselves hadn't killed Orion, they were acquainted with the men who had.

"Whoop it up, boys," Sam muttered as they rode away. "Whoop it up while you can."

He came away from the window and saw that Taylor was awake. Taylor had gotten up in the afternoon to meet with Noland, but then had gone back to bed.

"What's all the noise?" Taylor asked.

"Newspapers," Sam said. "I'll get one."

Taylor sneered. "Why? It's all abolitionist lies anyway."

But when Sam brought a copy of the Journal back upstairs and began reading, he found news. Horrifying, sickening news.

"Sons of bitches," he whispered.

"What is it?" Taylor asked. He was at the mirror, shaving, preparing for another night out in Lawrence's less-respectable quarter.

"A building in Kansas City collapsed yesterday," Sam said.

"Well, good."

Sam shook his head. "No, Fletch. It was the building on Grand Avenue where the Bluebellies were holding the women they suspected of aiding bushwhackers. The paper says four women were killed, and several others hurt."

Taylor stopped shaving. "That's where they were keeping Bloody Bill Anderson's sisters," he said. "Cole Younger and Johnny McCorkle had kin there too. Does the paper give names?"

"No. But of course it suggests that the collapse might have been caused by a charge set by guerrillas 'in a disastrous attempt to remove the ladies from Federal protection.'"

Taylor's upper lip curled back. "As if Southern men would endanger their women!" He shook his razor at the newspaper. "I'll tell you what, though. I was worrying that the Colonel might have trouble riling up some of the boys for this raid, especially since Noland has found out that Jim Lane's out of town. But this news will rile them like nobody's business. And if Bill Anderson's sisters have been hurt, you can bet that he and his boys will shit blue fire. God help any Unionists who cross their path." He dipped his razor in the bowl and turned back to the mirror. His eyes were bright. "Or mine, for that matter."

When Taylor had finished shaving, he asked if Sam would like to go out and have a time. Sam declined, and Taylor left without him.

Then Sam read the rest of the newspaper, most of which he found to be worthless. But he admired the typesetting. There were few mistakes, and most of the lines were evenly spaced and straight. He wondered how many of them the boy had set.

He put the newspaper aside and wrote in his journal until the evening light failed. Then he undressed and got into bed, but lay awake for so long that he almost decided to join Taylor after all. But he had no enthusiasm for the idea. Spy-work wasn't physically strenuous, but it took a lot out of him mentally.

When he finally fell asleep, he dreamed that he was a printer's devil for Orion again. This time, though, their newspaper was not the Hannibal Journal, but the Lawrence Journal.

He was setting type about a fire in which over a hundred and fifty people had been killed, when a man burst into the pressroom. The man was jug-eared, greasy-haired, narrow-faced, and beardless. His thick lips parted to reveal crooked, stained teeth. Sam had never seen him before.

The jug-eared man pulled a revolver from his belt and pointed it at Orion.

"Henry!" Orion shouted. "Run!"

Sam, his ink-smearred hands hanging useless at his sides, said, "But I'm Sam."

The jug-eared man shot Orion, who shriveled like a dying vine.

Then the stranger pointed his revolver at Sam.

Sam tried to turn and run, but his feet were stuck as if in thick mud.

The revolver fired with a sound like a cannon going off in a church, and the jug-eared man laughed.

Then Sam was floating near the ceiling, looking down at two bleeding bodies. Orion's face had become that of Josiah Trask, one of the editors of the Lawrence Journal. And Sam's face had become that of the boy, Henry, to whom he had given a cigar. The cigar was still in Henry's mouth.

Sam awoke crouched against the wall. He was dripping with sweat.

Night had fallen, and Lawrence was quiet. Taylor had not yet returned to the room. Sam crept away from the wall and sat on the edge of the bed, shivering.

"Henry," he whispered. "God damn."

#

At noon on Wednesday, August 19, Sam and Taylor were sitting on a log in southern Jackson County near the village of Lone Jack, in the midst of their fellow bushwhackers. They and Noland had returned to the Blue Springs camp two days before, and Colonel Quantrill had received their report with satisfaction. Then, on Tuesday morning, Quantrill had ordered his guerrillas to move out without telling them their objective. In order to fool any Federal scouts or pickets that might spot them, the Colonel had marched the bushwhackers eastward for several miles before cutting back to the southwest. En route, the band had been joined by Bill Anderson with forty men and Andy Blunt with over a hundred, almost doubling the size of Quantrill's force.

The men all knew something big was at hand. And now, finally, the Colonel was going to tell them what Sam thought it was about time.

Quantrill, flanked by George Todd and Bill Anderson, sat before the bushwhackers astride his one-eyed mare, Black Bess, and gave a screeching yell. Over three hundred voices responded, and a thrill ran up Sam's spine. The sound was both the most magnificent and most terrifying thing he had ever heard. If he were the enemy and heard that sound, he would be halfway to Colorado before the echo came back from the nearest hill.

The Colonel nodded in satisfaction. He was wearing a slouch hat with one side of the brim pinned up by a silver star, a loose gray guerrilla shirt with blue and silver embroidery, and gray trousers tucked into his cavalry boots. His belt bristled with four Colt pistols, and two more hung from holsters on either side of his saddle.

"Well, boys," Quantrill shouted, "I hope you ain't tired of riding just yet!"

He was answered by a loud, ragged chorus of "Hell, no!"

Quantrill laughed. "That's good," he cried, "because come nightfall, we're heading for Kansas Territory to see if we can pull its most rotten tooth: Lawrence!"

A moment of silence followed the announcement, and for that moment Sam wondered if the men had decided that the Colonel was out of his mind. But then the bushwhackers exploded into another shrieking cheer, and at least a hundred of them rose to their feet and fired pistols into the air.

Taylor clapped Sam on the shoulder. "Are these the best damn boys in Missouri, or ain't they!" he yelled.

"They're sure the loudest," Sam said.

Quantrill raised a hand, and the cheers subsided. "Save your ammunition," the Colonel shouted. "You've worked hard to make it or steal it, so don't waste it shooting at God. There are plenty of better targets where we're going!"

Another cheer rose up at that, but then Quantrill's expression changed from one of glee to one of cold, deadly intent. The bushwhackers fell silent.

"Boys," Quantrill said, no longer shouting, "there's more danger ahead than any of us have faced before. There could be Federals both behind and in front of us, coming and going. Now, we sent some men to spy on Lawrence, and they say the town's ripe to be taken -- but there might be pickets on the way there. So we could have General Ewing's Bluebellies down on us from Kansas City, and some from Leavenworth as well. I doubt that we'll all make it back to Missouri alive." He straightened in his saddle, and it seemed to Sam that his metallic gaze fell on each bushwhacker in turn. "So if there's any man who doesn't want to go into the Territory with the rest of us, now's your chance to head for home. After we leave here tonight, there will be no turning back. Not for anyone."

Beside Quantrill, Bill Anderson drew a pistol. Anderson's hair was even wilder than it had been when Sam had seen him in Quantrill's tent the week before, and his eyes were so fierce that they didn't look human. "Anyone who does turn back after we've started," Anderson cried, "will wish to God he'd been taken by the Yankees before I'm through with him!"

Taylor leaned close to Sam and whispered, "I think Bloody Bill's heard about the building in Kansas City."

Sam thought so too. In the face of Bill Anderson he saw a hatred that had become so pure that if Anderson ever ran out of enemies against whom to direct his rage, he would have to invent more.

"But although we'll be going through hardships," Quantrill continued, "the result will be worth it. Lawrence is the hotbed of abolitionism in Kansas, and most of the property stolen from Missouri can be found there, ready and waiting to be taken back by Missourians. Even if Jim Lane ain't home, his house and his plunder are. We can work more justice in Lawrence than anywhere else in five hundred miles! So who's going with me?"

The shrill cheer rose up a fourth time, and all of the men not already standing came to their feet. Despite Quantrill's warning to save ammunition, more shots were fired into the air.

Quantrill and his captains wheeled their horses and rode to their tent, and Sam left Taylor and went to the tree where he had tied Bixby. There, after avoiding Bixby's attempts to bite him, he opened one of his saddlebags, took out his revolver, and replaced its caps.

When he looked up again, he saw John Noland leaning against the tree, regarding him with casual disdain.

"You ain't gonna shoot something, are you, Mister Clemens?" Noland asked.

"I'll do my best if it becomes necessary," Sam said.

Noland gave a sardonic grunt. "If it becomes necessary," he repeated. "Why do you think we're goin' where we're goin'?"

"I should think that would be obvious," Sam said. "To retrieve that which belongs to Missouri, and to punish the jayhawkers and Red Legs who stole it."

"You'll know a jayhawker on sight, will you?" Noland asked.

"I'll know the Red Legs on sight, I'll tell you that."

Noland pushed away from the tree. "I reckon you will, if they sleep in their pants." He sauntered past Sam and tipped his hat. "Hooray for you, Mister Clemens. Hooray for us all."

"You don't sound too all-fired excited, Noland," Sam said.

Noland looked back with a grim smile. "You want to see me excited, Mister Clemens, you watch me get some of that free-soil money into my pocket. You watch me then." He tipped his hat again and walked away.

Sam watched him go. How, he wondered, could two men as different as Bill Anderson and John Noland be riding in the same guerrilla band on the same raid?

Then he looked down at the gun in his hand and remembered that he was riding with both of them.

Bixby nipped his arm. Sam jumped and cursed, then replaced his revolver in the saddlebag and gave Bixby a lump of sugar. The horse would soon need all the energy it could get.

#

At dusk, the Colonel had the bushwhackers mount up and proceed toward the southwest. Only thirteen men had left the raiders after Quantrill's announcement of the target, and only two of those had been members of Quantrill's own band. Sam marveled. Here were more than three hundred men going to what might be their deaths, just because one man had asked them to do so. True, each man had his own reasons for becoming a bushwhacker in the first place, but none of them would have dreamed of attempting a raid so far into Kansas if Quantrill had not offered to lead them in it.

In the middle of the night, the guerrillas happened upon a force of over a hundred Confederate recruits under the command of a Colonel John Holt. Holt and Quantrill conferred for an hour while the bushwhackers rested their horses, and when the guerrillas resumed their advance, Holt and his recruits joined them.

At daybreak on Thursday, August 20, Quantrill's raiders made camp beside the Grand River. They were only four miles from the border now, and this would be their final rest before the drive toward Lawrence. Late in the morning, fifty more men from Cass and Bates counties rode into the camp and offered their services. Quantrill accepted, and by Sam's count, the invasion force now consisted of almost five hundred men, each one mounted on a strong horse and armed with at least one pistol and as much ammunition as he could carry. A few of the men also had rifles, and many carried bundles of

pitch-dipped torches.

If Federal troops did attack them, Sam thought, the Bluebellies would get one hell of a fight for their trouble. They might also become confused about who was friend and who was foe, because almost two hundred of the bushwhackers were wearing parts of blue Union uniforms.

At mid-afternoon, Captain Todd rode among the dozing men and horses, shouting, "Saddle up, boys! Lawrence ain't gonna plunder itself, now, is it?"

The men responded with a ragged cheer. Sam got up, rolled his blanket, and then carried it and his saddle to the dead tree where Taylor's horse and Bixby were tied. He had spread his blanket in a shady spot and had tried to sleep, but had only managed to doze a little. Taylor, lying a few yards away, had started snoring at noon and hadn't stopped until Todd had ridden past.

"How you could sleep with what we've got ahead of us, I can't imagine," Sam said as Taylor came up to saddle his horse.

"I wasn't sleeping," Taylor said. "I was thinking over strategy."

"With help from the hive of bumblebees you swallowed, no doubt."

Taylor grinned. "We're gonna be fine, Sam," he said. "You know they ain't expecting us. So there's no need for a man to be afraid."

"No, I suppose not," Sam said. "Not unless a man has a brain."

Taylor frowned. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Sam took his Colt from his saddlebag and stuck it into his belt. "Nothing, Fletch. I just want to get there, get it done, and get back, is all."

"You and me and everybody else," Taylor said.

As Sam and Taylor mounted their horses, a cluster of eleven men rode past, yipping and laughing. They seemed eager to be at the head of the bushwhacker force as it entered Kansas.

The man leading the cluster was jug-eared, greasy-haired, narrow-faced, and beardless.

Sam's heart turned to ice. Slowly, he raised his arm and pointed at the cluster of men. "Who are they?" he asked. His throat was tight and dry.

"Some of Anderson's boys," Taylor said. "Full of piss and vinegar, ain't they?"

"Do you know the one in front?" Sam asked.

"Sure do," Taylor said. "I've even ridden with him a time or two. Name's Frank James. You can count on him in a fight, that's for sure." Taylor clicked his tongue, and his horse started after the cluster of Anderson's men.

Bixby followed Taylor's horse while Sam stared ahead at the man from his dream. The man who had entered the Journal pressroom, killed an unarmed man and boy, and then laughed.

At six o'clock, Quantrill's raiders crossed the border into Kansas.

Ahead, the Territory grew dark.

#

By eleven o'clock, when the raiders passed the town of Gardner, the moonless night was as black as Quantrill's horse. Gullies, creeks, and fences became obstacles, and some of the bushwhackers wanted to light torches to help them find their way. But Quantrill would not allow that. They were still over twenty miles from Lawrence, in open country, and could not afford to be spotted from a distance. Besides, the torches were supposed to be reserved for use in Lawrence itself.

Soon after midnight, Quantrill halted the bushwhackers near a farmhouse, and the word was passed back along the column for the men to keep quiet.

"What are we stopping here for?" Sam whispered. He and Taylor were riding near the middle of the column, and Sam couldn't see what was happening up front.

"Shush yourself," Taylor hissed.

A minute later, there was a yell from the farmhouse, and then laughter from some of the raiders.

The tall form of Captain Bill Gregg came riding back along the column. "All right, boys, we can travel on," he said. "We got ourselves a friendly Kansan to guide us!" He wheeled his horse and returned to the head of the column.

"Wonder what he means by that," Sam said.

Taylor chuckled. "What do you think?"

The bushwhackers started moving again and made rapid progress for a few miles, zigzagging around obstacles. Then Quantrill called another halt. The men began muttering, but fell silent as a pistol was fired.

Bixby jerked his head and shied away from the column. Sam had to fight to bring the horse back into place. "What in blazes is the matter with you?" he asked. Bixby had never been spooked by gunfire before. In fact, he had hardly noticed it. "It was just somebody's pistol going off by mistake!"

At that moment, Captain Gregg came riding by again. "No mistake about it," he said, pausing beside Sam and Taylor. "Our friendly Kansan claimed he didn't know which side of yonder hill we should go around. So the Colonel dispatched him to a hill of his own, and we're to wait until we have another friendly Kansan to guide us. There's a house ahead, and some of Anderson's boys are going to see who's home. We'll be on our way again before long." Gregg spurred his horse and continued back along the column to spread the word.

"Well, good for the Colonel," Taylor said. "Now that Kansan is as friendly to us as a Kansan can be."

Sam was stunned. When the raiders began moving again, they passed by the corpse. Bixby shied away from it and collided with Taylor's mount.

"Rein your goddamn horse, Sam!" Taylor snarled.

The dead man was wearing canvas trousers and was shirtless and barefoot. Even in the dark, Sam could see that his head was nothing but a mass of pulp.

It made no sense. This man wasn't a Red Leg or a Bluebelly. He might not even be an abolitionist. He was only a farmer. Colonel Quantrill had shot a farmer. Just because the man couldn't find his way in the dark.

Just because he was a Kansan.

Sam began to wonder if the preposterous stories he had read in abolitionist newspapers -- the stories about Quantrill's raids on Aubry, Olathe, and Shawneetown -- might have had some truth in them after all.

The column halted again after only a mile, and there was another gunshot. Then another farmhouse was raided, and the bushwhackers continued on their way. But soon they stopped once more, and a third shot was fired.

The process was repeated again and again. Each time, Sam and Bixby passed by a fresh corpse.

There were ten in all.

Sam felt dizzy and sick. This was supposed to be a raid to punish the Red Legs, destroy the newspaper, burn out Jim Lane, and recover stolen property. Some Kansans were to be killed, yes; but they were supposed to be Red Legs and Bluebellies, not unarmed farmers taken from their wives and children in the night.

At the tenth corpse, Taylor maneuvered his horse past Sam and Bixby. "Scuse me, Clemens," Taylor said. "My horse is starting to make water."

Taylor stopped the horse over the dead man and let it piss on the body. The bushwhackers who were close enough to see it laughed, and Sam tried to laugh as well. He didn't want them to see his horror. He was afraid of them all now. Even Taylor. Especially Taylor.

"Have your horses drink deep at the next crick, boys!" Taylor chortled. "There's plenty of men in Lawrence who need a bath as bad as this one!"

"Amen to that!" someone cried.

The shout was echoed up and down the line as Taylor rejoined the column next to Sam.

Captain Gregg came riding back once more. "I admire your sentiments, boys," he said, "but I suggest you save the noise until we reach our destination. Then you can holler all you want, and see if you can squeeze a few hollers from the so-called men of Lawrence as well!"

The bushwhackers laughed again, but then lowered their voices to whispers. To Sam, it sounded like the hissing of five hundred snakes.

He saw now that what was going to happen in Lawrence would resemble what he had imagined it would be only in the way that a volcano resembled a firefly. He had let his guilt over Orion's death and his hatred of the Red Legs blind him to what the men he was riding with had become. He wanted to turn

Bixby out of the column and ride hard and fast back to Missouri, not stopping until he reached Hannibal.

But he knew that he couldn't. Anderson had told them all how deserters would be dealt with. Sam and Bixby wouldn't make it more than a hundred yards before a dozen men were after them. And there was no doubt of what would happen to Sam when they caught him.

Besides, his and Taylor's report from their trip to Lawrence was part of what had convinced Quantrill that the raid was possible. That made Sam more responsible for what was about to happen than almost anyone else. To run away now would make him not only a coward, but a hypocrite.

Another farmhouse was raided at about three in the morning, and this time the entire column broke up and gathered around to watch. By the time Sam was close enough to see what was happening, the farmer was on his knees in his yard. Captain Todd was standing before him holding a pistol to his forehead and telling him the names of some of the men waiting for him in hell. Quantrill, on Black Bess, came up beside Todd. "We're too close to Lawrence to fire a gun now, George," he said. Sam could just make out Todd's expression. It was one of fury.

"Goddamn it, Bill," Todd said. "This man's name is Joe Stone. He's a stinking Missouri Unionist who ran off to Kansas to escape justice, and I'm going to kill him no matter what you say."

Stone, wearing only a nightshirt, was shuddering. Sam looked away from him and saw a woman crying in the doorway of the house. A child clung to the woman's knees, wailing. An oil lamp was burning inside, and its weak light framed the woman and child so that they seemed to be suspended inside a pale flame.

Quantrill stroked his stubbled face with a thumb and forefinger. "Well, George, I agree that traitors must die. But we're within six miles of Lawrence now, and a shot might warn the town."

Todd seemed about to retort, but then took his pistol away from Stone's head and replaced it in his belt. "All right," he said. "We'll keep it quiet." He strode to his horse and pulled his Sharps carbine from its scabbard. "Sam!" he called. "Get over here!"

Taylor nudged Sam in the ribs. "Go on," he said.

Sam, almost rigid with terror, began to dismount.

"I mean Sam Clifton," Todd said. "Where is he?"

Sam returned to his saddle as Clifton, a stranger who had joined the guerrillas while the spies had been in Lawrence, dismounted and went to Todd.

Todd handed the rifle to Clifton. "Some of the boys tell me you've been asking a lot of questions, Mister Clifton," he said. "So let's see if you know what you're here for." He pointed at Stone. "Beat that traitor down to hell."

Clifton didn't hesitate. He took three quick steps and smashed the rifle butt into Stone's face. Stone fell over in the dirt, and his wife and child screamed. Then Clifton pounded Stone's skull.

Sam wanted to turn away, but he couldn't move. This was the most horrible thing he had ever seen, more horrible even than his brother Henry lying in his coffin or his brother Orion lying in the road. He watched it all. He couldn't stop himself.

Only when it was over, when Clifton had stopped pounding and Stone was nothing but a carcass, was Sam able to look away. Beside him, Taylor was grinning. Some of the others were grinning too. But there were also a few men who looked so sick that Sam thought they might fall from their horses.

Then he looked at Colonel Quantrill. Quantrill's eyes were unblinking, reflecting the weak light from the house. His lips were pulled back in a tight smile.

Todd took his rifle back from Clifton and replaced it in its scabbard without wiping it clean. Then he looked up at Quantrill with a defiant sneer.

"That suit you, Colonel?" he asked.

Quantrill nodded. "That suits me fine, Captain," he said. Then he faced the men. "Remember this, boys," he cried, "and serve the men of Lawrence the same! Kill! Kill, and you'll make no mistake! Now push on, or it'll be daylight before we get there!"

"You heard the man," Taylor said to Sam.

"That I did," Sam said. His voice was hoarse. He thought it might stay hoarse forever.

The raiders pushed on, leaving Mrs. Stone and her child to weep over the scrap of flesh in their yard.

As the column reformed, Sam found himself near its head, riding not far behind Gregg, Todd, Anderson, and Quantrill himself. It was as if God wanted to be sure that Sam had another good view when the next man died.

#

The eastern sky was turning from black to purplish-gray as Quantrill's raiders reached the crest of the hill southeast of Lawrence. Colonel Quantrill raised his right hand, and the column halted.

Below them, less than two miles ahead, Lawrence lay as silent as death.

Fletcher Taylor cackled. "Look at 'em! Damn Yankees are curled up with their thumbs in their mouths!"

Sam nodded, sick at heart.

Quantrill brought out a spyglass and trained it on the sleeping town. "It looks ripe," he said. "But I can't see the river; it's still too dark." He lowered the glass and turned to Captain Gregg. "Bill, take five men and reconnoiter. The rest of us will wait fifteen minutes and then follow. If you spot trouble, run back and warn us."

Gregg gave Quantrill a salute, then pointed at each of the five men closest to him. "James, Younger, McCorkle, Taylor, and --" He was looking right at Sam.

Sam couldn't speak. His tongue was as cold and heavy as clay. He stared at Frank James.

"Clemens," Taylor said.

"Right," Gregg said. "Clemens. Come on, boys." He kicked his horse and started down the hillside.

"Let's get to it, Sam," Taylor said. He reached over and swatted Bixby on the rump, and Bixby lurched forward.

Despite the steep slope and the trees that dotted it, Gregg set a rapid pace. All Sam could do was hang on to Bixby's reins and let the horse find its own way. He wished that Bixby would stumble and that he would be thrown and break an arm or leg. But Bixby was too agile for that. Sam would be in on the Lawrence raid from beginning to end.

Halfway down the hill, Gregg stopped his horse, and James, Younger, McCorkle, and Taylor did the same. Bixby stopped on his own, almost throwing Sam against the pommel of his saddle.

"What's wrong, Captain?" Taylor asked.

Gregg put a finger to his lips and then extended that finger to point.

A few hundred feet farther down the hillside, a mule carrying a lone figure in a white shirt was making its way up through the trees. The mule and rider were just visible in the predawn light.

"What's someone doing out here this early?" Taylor whispered.

"Doesn't matter," Gregg whispered back. "If he sees us and we let him escape, we're as good as dead."

"But, but a shot would wake up the town, Captain," Sam stammered.

Gregg gave him a glance. "Then we won't fire a shot that can be heard in the town." He turned toward Frank James. "Go kill him, Frank. Use your knife, or put your pistol in his belly to muffle the noise. Or knock his brains out. I don't care, so long as you keep it quiet."

James drew his pistol, cocked it, and started his horse down the hill.

The figure on the mule came around a tree. He was alone and unarmed. Sam could see his face now. He was the printer's devil from the Lawrence Journal.

Henry.

Frank James plunged downward, his right arm outstretched, pointing the finger of Death at an innocent.

And in that instant, Sam saw everything that was to come, and the truth of everything that had been. He saw it all as clearly as any of his dreams:

The boy would be lying on his back on the ground. His white shirt would be soaked with blood. Sam would be down on his knees beside him, stroking his forehead, begging his forgiveness. He would want to give anything to undo what had been done. But it would be too late.

Henry would mumble about his family, about the loved ones who would never see him again. And then he would look up at Sam with reproachful eyes, and die.

Just as it had happened before.

Not when Sam's brother Henry had died. Henry had given him no reproachful look, and all he had said was "Thank you, Sam."

Not when Orion had died, either. Orion had said, "Get out of here, Sam," and there had been no reproach in the words. Only concern. Only love.

Frank James plunged downward, his right arm outstretched, pointing the finger of Death at an innocent.

An innocent like the one Sam had killed.

It had been more than just a dream.

He had told himself that he wasn't the only one of the Marion Rangers who had fired. He never hit anything he aimed at anyway. But in his heart he had known that wasn't true this time. He had known that he was guilty of murder, and of the grief that an innocent, unarmed man's family had suffered because of it.

All of his guilt, all of his need to make amends --

It wasn't because of his dead brothers at all.

It was because he had killed a man who had done nothing to him.

Sam had tried to escape that truth by fleeing West with Orion. But then, when Orion had been murdered, he had tried instead to bury his guilt by embracing it and by telling himself that the war made killing honorable if it was done in a just cause. And vengeance, he had told himself, was such a cause.

But the family of the man he had killed might well have thought the same thing.

Frank James plunged downward, his right arm outstretched, pointing the finger of Death at an innocent.

And Sam couldn't stand it anymore.

He yelled like a madman, and then Bixby was charging down the hill, flashing past the trees with a speed no other horse in Quantrill's band could equal. When Bixby came alongside James's horse, Sam jerked the reins. Bixby slammed into James's horse and forced it into a tree. James was knocked from his saddle, and his pistol fired.

Henry's mule collapsed, and Henry tumbled to the ground.

Sam reined Bixby to a halt before the dying mule, leaped down, and dropped to his knees beside the boy.

Henry looked up at him with an expression of contempt. "Are you crazy or something?" he asked.

Sam grabbed him and hugged him.

Henry struggled to get away. "Mister Clemens? What in the world are you doing?"

Sam looked up the slope and saw Frank James picking himself up. James's horse was standing nearby, shaking its head and whinnying.

Gregg, Taylor, McCorkle, and Younger were riding down with their pistols drawn.

Sam jumped up and swung Henry into Bixby's saddle. "Lean down close to me," he said.

"What for?" Henry asked. The boy looked dazed now. He was staring down at the dead mule.

"Just do it, and listen to what I say," Sam said. "I have to tell you something without those men hearing it."

Henry leaned down.

"Ride back to town as fast as you can," Sam said. "When you're close enough for people to hear, yell that Charley Hart's come back, that his new name is Billy Quantrill, and that he has five hundred men with him. And if you can't remember all that, just yell 'Quantrill!' Yell 'Quantrill!' over and over until you reach the Eldridge House, and then go inside and yell 'Quantrill!' at everyone there. If they don't believe you, just point at this horse and ask where the hell they think you got it. Now sit up!"

Henry sat up, and Sam slapped Bixby on the rump. Bixby turned back and tried to bite Sam's shoulder.

"Not now, you fleabag!" Sam yelled. He raised his hand to swat the horse again, but Bixby snorted and leaped over the dead mule before Sam could touch him. The roan charged down the hillside as fast as before, with Henry hanging on tight.

Sam took a deep breath and turned as he exhaled. Frank James was walking toward him with murder in his eyes, and the four men riding up behind James didn't look any happier. Sam put his hand on the Colt in his belt, but didn't think he could draw it. He feared that he was going to piss his pants. But he had to give Henry a good head start. And if that meant getting himself killed -- well, that was just what it meant. Better him than a boy whose only crime was setting type for an abolitionist newspaper.

"You traitorous bastard," James said, raising his revolver to point at Sam's face.

Sam swallowed and found his voice. "Your barrel's full of dirt," he said.

James looked at his gun and saw that it was true.

Captain Gregg cocked his own pistol. "Mine, however, is clean," he said.

Sam raised his hands. "Don't shoot, Captain," he said. He was going to have to tell a whopper, and fast. "I apologize to Mister James, but I had to keep him from killing my messenger, didn't I? I would've said something sooner, but I didn't see who the boy was until James was already after him."

"Messenger?" Gregg said.

Sam looked up at Taylor, whose expression was one of mingled anger and disbelief. "Why don't you say something, Fletch? Didn't you recognize the boy?"

Taylor blinked. "What are you yapping about?"

Sam lowered his hands, put them on his hips, and tried to look disgusted. "Damn it, Fletch, that Missouri boy I met in Lawrence. The one whose father was killed by jayhawkers, and who was kidnapped to Kansas. I pointed him out to you Saturday morning, but I guess you'd gotten too drunk the night before to retain the information."

Gregg looked at Taylor. "You were drinking whiskey while you were supposed to be scouting the town, Corporal?"

Taylor became indignant. "Hell, no!"

"Then why don't you remember me pointing that boy out to you?" Sam asked.

"Well, I do," Taylor said uncertainly.

Sam knew he couldn't let up. "So why didn't you tell Captain Gregg that the boy promised to come here and warn us if any more Federals moved into Lawrence?"

Taylor's eyes looked panicky. "I didn't recognize the boy. It's dark."

"What's this about more Bluebellies in Lawrence?" Gregg asked.

"That's what the boy told me," Sam said. "Six hundred troops, four hundred of them cavalry, came down from Leavenworth on Tuesday. They're all camped on the south side of the river, too, he says."

Frank James had his pistol barrel clean now, and he pointed the gun at Sam again. "So why'd you send him away?"

Sam was so deep into his story now that he almost forgot his fear. "Because he said the Bluebellies have started sending fifty cavalymen out between five and six every morning to scout the plain between here and Mount Oread. I told him to go keep watch and to come back when he saw them."

Cole Younger, stern-faced and narrow-lipped, gestured at Sam with his revolver. "Why would you tell someone in Lawrence who you were and why you were there?"

"I already said why," Sam snapped. "Because he's a Missouri boy, and he hates the Yankees as much as you or me. Maybe more, because he didn't even have a chance to grow up before they took everything he had. And I didn't just walk up and take him into my confidence for no reason. Two Red Legs were dunking him in a horse trough until he was half drowned. When they left, I asked him why they'd done it, and he said it was because he'd called them murdering Yankee cowards. My opinion was that we could use a friend like that in Lawrence, and Fletch agreed."

John McCorkle, a round-faced man in a flat-brimmed hat, peered at Sam through narrowed eyelids. "So how'd the boy know where we'd be, and when?"

"He knew the where because we told him," Sam said. "The Colonel used to live in these parts, and he picked this hill for our overlook when he planned the raid. Ain't that so, Fletch?"

Taylor nodded.

"As for the when of it," Sam continued, "well, Fletch and I knew we'd be here before sunup either yesterday or today, so we told the boy to come out both days if there was anything we needed to hear about."

Younger looked at Taylor. "That true, Fletch? Or were you so drunk you don't remember?"

Taylor glared at him. "It's true, Cole. I just didn't tell you, is all. There's five hundred men on this raid, and I can't tell every one of you everything, can I?"

Younger started to retort, but he was interrupted by the sound of hundreds of hoofbeats from the slope above. Quantrill had heard James's gunshot and was bringing down the rest of his men.

Gregg replaced his pistol in its holster. "All right, then," he said, sounding weary. "Let's tell the Colonel what the boy said." He looked at Taylor. "You do it, Fletch. He knows you better than he does Clemens."

Taylor nodded, then shot Sam a look that could have melted steel.

There was a promise in that look, but Sam didn't care. Gregg had believed his story, and for now, at least, he was still alive.

And so was Henry.

#

Taylor told Colonel Quantrill that a Missouri boy had come to warn the raiders about six hundred new Bluebellies in Lawrence, all camped south of the river, and that a scouting party of fifty of the Federals was likely to spot the bushwhackers before they could enter the town. Quantrill listened without saying a word. He stared straight ahead, toward Lawrence, until Taylor was finished. Then he looked down at Sam, who was still standing before the dead mule.

Quantrill's eyes were like chips of ice, but Sam didn't look away. He was sure that if he flinched, the Colonel would see him for the lying traitor that he was.

A long moment later, Quantrill turned to Captain Todd. "What do you think, George?" he asked.

Todd looked as if he had eaten a bad persimmon. "You didn't see six hundred Federals through the glass, did you?"

"No," Quantrill said, "but I couldn't see the river. If they were camped close by its banks, they would have been invisible."

"Then let's go back up and take another look," Todd said.

Quantrill shook his head. "By the time the sun has risen enough for us to see the river, the people of Lawrence will have risen too. We must either press on now, or give it up."

"But if there are that many more troops down there," Gregg said, "we won't have a chance. I say we fall back to the border, send more spies to take another look at the town, and come back when we can be sure of victory."

Quantrill looked at the ground and spat. "Damn it all," he said, "but you're right. Even if there aren't that many troops, the town might've heard the pistol shot."

The men behind Quantrill murmured. Many looked angry or disappointed, but almost as many looked relieved.

Sam tried hard to look disappointed, but he wanted to shout for joy.

Then Bill Anderson shrieked, drew one of his pistols, and kicked his horse until it was nose to nose with Black Bess.

"We've come too far!" he screamed, pointing his pistol at the Colonel. "We've come too far and our people have suffered too much! This raid was your idea, and you talked me into committing my own men to the task! God damn you, Quantrill, you're going to see it through!"

Quantrill gave Anderson a cold stare. "We have received new intelligence," he said. "The situation has changed."

Anderson shook his head, his long hair flying wild under his hat. "Nothing has changed! Nothing! The Yankees have killed one of my sisters and crippled another, and I won't turn back until I've killed two hundred of them as payment! And if you try to desert me before that's done, the two-hundred-and-first man I kill will be named Billy Quantrill!"

Quantrill turned to Todd. "George, place Captain Anderson under arrest."

Todd drew his pistol. "I don't think I will," he said, moving his horse to stand beside Anderson's. "We've come to do a thing, so let's do it."

The murmurs among the men grew louder.

"What's wrong with you?" Gregg shouted at Todd and Anderson. "Colonel Quantrill is your commanding officer!"

Todd sneered. "No more of that 'Colonel' bullshit. Jefferson Davis wouldn't give this coward the time of day, much less a commission."

At that, Frank James, John McCorkle, and Cole Younger moved to stand with Anderson and Todd. Bill Gregg, Andy Blunt, and John Holt moved to stand with Quantrill. The murmurs among the bushwhackers became shouts and curses. A few men broke away and rode back up the hill.

Sam decided that he didn't care to see the outcome. He began edging backward, but came up against the dead mule.

Quantrill looked as calm as an undertaker. "All right, boys," he said. "I guess you're right. We've come this far, and we've whipped Yankee soldiers before." He pointed toward Lawrence. "Let's push on!"

"That's more like it," Anderson said, and he and his comrades turned their horses toward Lawrence.

As soon as they had turned, Quantrill pulled two of his pistols from his belt, cocked them, and shot Bill Anderson in the back. Anderson slumped, and his horse reared.

The hillside erupted into an inferno of muzzle flashes, explosions, and screams.

Sam dove over the mule and huddled against its back until he heard pistol balls thudding into its belly. Then he rolled away and scrambled down the hill on his hands and knees. When there were plenty of trees between him and the fighting, he got to his feet and ran. He fell several times before reaching the bottom of the hill, but didn't let that slow him.

The trees gave way to prairie grass and scrub brush at the base of the hill, and Sam ran straight for Lawrence. He couldn't see Henry and Bixby on the plain ahead, so he hoped they were already in town.

Thunder rumbled behind him, and he looked back just in time to see the neck of a horse and the heel of a boot. The boot struck him in the forehead and knocked him down. His hat went flying.

Sam lay on his back and stared up at the brightening sky. Then the silhouette of a horse's head appeared above him, and hot breath blasted his face.

"Get up and take your pistol from your belt," a voice said.

Sam turned over, rose to his knees, and looked up at the rider. It was Fletch Taylor. He had a Colt Navy revolver pointed at Sam's nose.

"You going to kill me, Fletch?" Sam asked.

"Not on your knees," Taylor said. "Stand up, take your pistol from your belt, and die the way a man should."

Sam gave a low, bitter chuckle. He was amazed to discover that he wasn't afraid.

"All men die alike, Fletch," he said. "Reluctantly."

Taylor kept his pistol pointed at Sam for another few seconds, then cursed and uncocked it. He looked toward the hill. "Listen to all the hell you've raised," he said.

The sounds of gunshots and screams were wafting out over the plain like smoke.

Taylor looked back at Sam. "You saved my life," he said, "so now I'm giving you yours. But if I ever see you again, I'll kill you."

Sam nodded. "Thank you, Fletch."

Taylor's lips curled back from his teeth. "Go to hell," he said. Then he spurred his horse and rode back toward the hill.

Sam watched Taylor go until he realized that the fighting on the hillside was spilling onto the plain. He stood, found his hat -- the hat that Taylor had given him -- and ran for Lawrence again.

When he reached Massachusetts Street, staggering, exhausted, he saw men in the windows of every building. Some wore blue uniforms, but most were civilians. Each man held either a revolver or a carbine. The sun was rising, and Lawrence was awake. One of the men came outside and pointed his rifle at Sam, but the boy named Henry appeared and stopped him. Then Henry grabbed Sam's arm and pulled him into the Whitney House.

Fifteen minutes later, Sam was watching from the window of a second-floor room when a magnificent black horse came galloping up Massachusetts Street. The horse's rider, wearing an embroidered gray shirt, gray pants, and black cavalry boots, had his arms tied behind his back and his feet tied to his stirrups. His head and shoulders had been daubed with pitch and set ablaze. He was screaming.

"It's Quantrill!" someone cried.

A volley of shots exploded from both sides of the street, and the horse and rider fell over dead.

Within seconds, a hundred Missouri guerrillas led by George Todd charged up the street. Fourteen of them were cut down in a hail of lead balls, and the rest turned and fled, with soldiers and citizens pursuing. A company of Negro Federal recruits led the chase and killed three more bushwhackers at the southern edge of town.

When the gunfire and shouting had ceased, a cluster of townspeople gathered around the carcass of the black horse and the charred, bloody corpse of its rider. The crowd parted to let two men in black suits and hats approach the bodies. Sam recognized them as the preachers that he, Taylor, and Noland had encountered the week before.

The elder preacher held a Bible over Quantrill's corpse. "Earth to earth," he intoned.

The younger preacher raised his Bible as well. "Ashes to ashes," he said.

In unison, they chanted, "And dust to dust."

Then they lowered their Bibles, drew their revolvers, and shot Quantrill a few more times for good measure.

"Amen," said the crowd.

Sam closed his curtains.

#

Senator Jim Lane had returned to Lawrence on Wednesday for a railroad meeting, and he sent for Sam at noon on Saturday, one day after the failed raid. Lane was thinner, younger, and had more hair than Sam had guessed from the caricatures, but his fine house on the western edge of town was all that Sam had supposed. It was packed with expensive furnishings, including two pianos in the parlor.

"How did you come to acquire two pianos, Senator?" Sam asked. He had not slept the night before and did not care if he sounded accusatory.

Lane smiled. "One was my mother's," he said. "The other belonged to a secessionist over in Jackson County who found that he no longer had a place to keep it." The Senator picked up a pen and wrote a few lines on a piece of paper, then folded the paper and pushed it across the table. "Kansas is grateful to you, Mister Clemens, and regrets the mistake of two years past when members of the Red-Legged Guards mistook your brother for a slaveholder. Had they known of his appointment as Secretary of Nevada Territory, I'm sure the tragedy would not have occurred."

"He told them," Sam said. "They didn't believe him."

Lane shrugged. "What's done is done, but justice will be served. General Ewing has ordered his troops to arrest all Red Legs they encounter. He believes that such men have been committing criminal acts in the name of liberty, and I must concur." He tapped the piece of paper. "I'm told that Governor Nye of Nevada Territory is again in need of a Secretary. I cannot guarantee you the appointment, but this should smooth your way." He leaned forward. "Frankly, Mr. Clemens, I think your decision to continue to

Nevada is a good one. There are those in this town who believe that the burning man was not Quantrill at all, and that you are here not as a friend, but as Quantrill's spy."

Sam stared at the piece of paper. "A ticket on the overland stage from St. Joseph is a hundred and fifty dollars," he said. "I have ten."

Lane stood and left the parlor for a few minutes. When he returned, he handed Sam three fifty-dollar bank notes and a bottle of whiskey.

"This was distilled from Kansas corn," the Senator said, tapping the bottle with a fingernail. "I thought you should have something by which to remember my state."

Sam tucked the money into a coat pocket and stood, holding the whiskey bottle by its neck. My state, Lane had said. What's done is done.

"Good day, Senator," Sam said. He started to turn away.

"Don't forget my letter of introduction," Lane said.

Sam picked up the piece of paper, tucked it into his pocket with the money, and left the house.

Henry was standing outside holding Bixby's reins, and twelve Bluebellies waited nearby. They had an extra horse with them.

"Mister Clemens," one of the soldiers called. "Our orders are to escort you to St. Joseph. We're to leave right away." He didn't sound happy about it. All of the Bluebellies in the escort were white, and Sam suspected that this was their punishment for failing to chase the bushwhackers with as much vigor as their Negro counterparts.

Sam nodded to the soldier, then looked down at Henry. "I suppose you want to keep the horse," he said.

"Well, I don't," Henry said. "He's mean, if you ask me. But my pa says he'll either have Bixby as payment for his mule, or he'll take it out of somebody's hide. And since you're running off, I reckon my hide will do him as well as any."

"A hiding would probably do you a considerable amount of good," Sam said, "but since I no longer have a use for the animal, you may keep him and the saddle as well. I'll take the bags, however." He removed the saddlebags from the horse and put the bottle of whiskey into one of them. A few lumps of brown sugar lay at the bottom of that bag, so he fed one to Bixby. Bixby chewed and swallowed, then tried to bite Sam's hand. Sam gave the rest of the sugar to Henry and took his saddlebags to the soldiers' extra horse.

"Goodbye, Mister Clemens," Henry said, climbing onto Bixby. "I won't forget you."

Sam swung up onto his own mount. "Thank you, boy," he said, "but I shall be doing my best to forget you, as well as every other aspect of this infected pustule of a city."

Henry gave him a skeptical look. "Mister Clemens," he said, "I think you're a liar."

"I won't dispute that," Sam said. "I only wish I could make it pay."

The Bluebellies set off, and Sam's mount went with them. Sam looked back to give Henry and Bixby a wave, but they were already heading in the other direction and didn't see him.

On the way to the ferry, Sam and the soldiers passed by the Eldridge House, where eighteen bodies had been laid out on the sidewalk. They were already beginning to stink. A number of townspeople were still gathered here, and from what Sam could hear, they were curious about the dead black man, who had been one of the three raiders killed by the Negro recruits. Why on earth, they wondered, would a man of his race ride with Quantrill?

Sam started to say, "Because he was paid," but the words froze in his throat.

The last four bodies on the sidewalk were those of George Todd, Cole Younger, Frank James, and Fletcher Taylor.

Sam looked away and rode on.

#

He spent Saturday night camped beside the road with the soldiers and Sunday night in a hotel in St. Joseph, and did not sleep either night. At daybreak on Monday, he carried his saddlebags to the overland stage depot, paid his money, and boarded the coach. Two other passengers and several sacks of mail soon joined him, and the coach set off westward at eight o'clock.

As the coach passed the spot where Orion had been killed, Sam took out the whiskey that Lane had given him and began drinking. He offered some to his fellow passengers, but they each took one swallow and then refused more, saying that it was the vilest stuff they'd ever tasted. Sam agreed, but drank almost half the bottle anyway.

At the next station stop, he climbed atop the coach with his saddlebags while the horses were being changed. When the coach started moving again, Sam drank more whiskey and stared at the fields of green and gold. Soon, his head warm with sun and alcohol, it occurred to him that the corn and grass shifting in the breeze looked like ocean swells after a storm. He was reminded of a holiday he had spent near New Orleans, looking out at the Gulf of Mexico after piloting a steamboat down the Mississippi. He wondered if he would love anything in Nevada half as much.

The thought of Nevada reminded him of the letter that Jim Lane had written for him, so he took it out and read it:

My dear Governor Nye:

You will recall that your intended Secretary of two years past, Mr. Orion Clemens, was unfortunately killed before he could assume his duties. This letter will introduce his younger brother Samuel, who has provided service to his Nation and is a loyal Republican. I trust you shall do your utmost to secure for him any employment for which he might be suited.

Yours most sincerely,

James Lane, Senator

The Great and Noble State of Kansas

Sam tore up the letter and let its pieces scatter in the wind. If Nevada held "any employment for which he might be suited," he would secure it without any assistance from a self-righteous, thieving son of a bitch like Jim Lane.

Nor would he drink any more of Lane's abominable whiskey. He leaned over the coach roof's thin iron rail and emptied the bottle onto the road. Then he opened one of his saddlebags, took out his Colt, and stood. He held the whiskey bottle in his left hand and the pistol in his right.

The coach conductor glanced back at him. "What are you doing, sir?" he asked.

Sam spread his arms. "I am saying fare-thee-well to the bloody state of Kansas," he cried, "and lighting out for the Territory!"

He looked out over the tall grass. It rippled in waves.

He missed the river.

He missed his brothers.

But killing men for the sake of a world that was gone wouldn't bring it back. It was time to make a new one.

"Half-less twain!" he cried.

Both the conductor and driver stared back at him.

"Quarter-less twain!" Sam shouted.

Then he brought his left arm back and whipped it forward, throwing the bottle out over the grass. As it reached the apex of its flight, he brought up his right arm, cocked the Colt with his thumb, and squeezed the trigger.

The bottle exploded into brilliant shards.

The coach lurched, and Sam sat down on the roof with a thump.

"Goddamn it!" the conductor yelled. "You spook these horses again, and I'll throw you off!"

Sam held the pistol by its barrel and offered it to the conductor. "Please accept this," he said, "with my apologies."

The conductor took it. "I'll give it back when you're sober."

"No," Sam said, "you won't."

Then he threw back his head and roared: "MAAARRRRK TWAIINN!"

Two fathoms. Safe water.

He lay down with his hat over his face and fell asleep, and no dead men came to haunt his dreams.

For Sam Clemens, the war was over.

END